

# Setting a Housing Policy Agenda

## Guiding Principles for State Housing Policy

### Housing should be a high state, local and regional priority

*State policy should clearly recognize the importance and priority of an adequate housing supply*

*The state and localities should recognize the linkage between housing and other critical needs and priorities*

*Housing availability and choice should be addressed on a regional basis*

*State policy should more clearly define responsibility for housing outcomes and create more effective structures for regional and inter-agency cooperation*

#### **Housing is critical to the economic and social well being of Virginia**

State housing policy should recognize that the long-term economic viability and sustainability of Virginia's localities and their regions depends on adequate ongoing investment in the preservation and expansion of housing choices.

#### **Housing is not an isolated policy issue**

Housing should be an integral part of the framework of state, local and regional planning and policy-making for community development, transportation, economic development, education, health and human services.

#### **Thriving communities are tied to thriving regions**

State housing policy should recognize that Virginia's urban and rural localities are part of larger regional communities that cannot grow and prosper unless housing choices for all residents enable ready access to the economic and social opportunities their region provides.

#### **Housing solutions require cooperative and coordinated state and local efforts**

Authority for addressing housing needs should be coordinated between federal, state and local entities, and between housing development and residential service providers, with clearly defined responsibility for development of housing policy and outcomes.

State housing policy should recognize the need for incentives and structures for local governments to develop coordinated regional approaches to housing issues.

## All groups should have fair access to quality housing choices

*State and local governments have an obligation to fully accommodate the housing needs of all groups*

*Housing policy should promote the creation and preservation of safe, attractive, and diverse communities*

### **Housing should fully reflect people's diverse needs**

State and local governments should plan for and accommodate the development of a variety of housing options that fully reflect the economic means and specific needs of all groups.

### **All Virginians should have housing choices that provide access to economic and social opportunity**

All households should have access to quality, affordable housing choices in safe, attractive, neighborhoods that provide economic and social opportunities.

State housing policy should recognize the key link between quality, affordable housing, neighborhood revitalization and elimination of blight, and provide coordinated solutions to those needs.

State housing policy should also address the problems of concentrated poverty by promoting greater opportunity for residential mobility among low-income households and the development of more economically diverse neighborhoods and communities.

## Increased affordability should be a policy priority

*The homeless, people with disabilities, seniors on fixed incomes, and other very low-income households require ongoing housing assistance*

*Land use planning and regulation should address the growing shortage of developable residential land and its impact on housing costs*

### **Very low-income people cannot afford quality unassisted housing anywhere in Virginia**

State housing policy should recognize that the Commonwealth cannot meet its obligation under the Olmstead decision to provide community housing alternatives to institutional living for people with disabilities, or achieve its goal of ending chronic homelessness, in the absence of adequate, ongoing housing subsidies.

Current subsidies for shelter and residential services should be redirected from institutional models, and instead promote a diversity of quality, affordable, accessible, and non-segregated housing choices.

### **Constraints on residential development are contributing to unaffordable housing costs**

State housing policy should recognize that low-density development is contributing to shortages of developable land and the escalating cost of housing, which existing subsidies cannot fully offset.

Accommodation of higher densities and diverse housing choices should be recognized as necessary means for encouraging a supply of quality, affordable housing adequate to meet current and future needs.

The state and localities should together seek new development models that will accommodate current and future housing needs in a manner that is acceptable to the public.

## **Increased affordability should be a policy priority** (continued)

*The high cost of housing throughout Virginia requires increased assistance to close the affordability gap for low- and moderate-income working households*

### **Younger and lower-wage workers are struggling to afford quality housing**

State housing policy should recognize that high land costs preclude the development of quality housing that is affordable to Virginia's younger and lower wage workforce without direct or in-direct subsidies.

State housing policy should also recognize that the federal government is receding from its traditional role as the primary provider of needed housing subsidies, and is now looking for state and local governments to assume a larger role.

State housing policy should address the scope of state and local responsibility for providing housing subsidies and identify the ongoing commitment required to meet current and future needs.

## **Homeownership should build long-term financial security**

*Expanded access to mortgage credit should be balanced with increased financial literacy and restriction of predatory lending practices*

### **Financial literacy and consumer safeguards are essential to sustained high rates of homeownership**

State housing policy should recognize that enhanced financial literacy is critical to the long-term housing security and financial health of the Commonwealth's citizens.

Home purchase is both the largest single investment made by most households as well as the largest source of household wealth—Therefore, the state and local governments should establish policies that promote sound and secure home financing decisions, support the growth of home equity, and minimize foreclosures.

State regulatory policy should ensure fair, sound lending and restrict abusive practices that pose harm to borrowers and local communities.

## **New design and building practices should be encouraged**

*The state should actively encourage wider acceptance of new residential design and building practices that enhance accessibility and address environmental concerns*

### **Virginia should encourage accessible design and green building**

State housing policy should recognize that the need for a more accessible residential environment is increasing as Virginia's population ages, and as the Olmstead decision heightens the priority on expanding housing alternatives for people with disabilities.

State housing policy should also recognize that energy shortages and growing environmental concerns are elevating the public's desire for greater energy efficiency and use of green building practices. Increased energy efficiency will be essential to maintaining housing affordability as energy costs rise.

## Sound policy depends on information and analysis

*The state should develop sufficient organizational capacity to provide ongoing information and analysis for housing policy-making*

### **There is a need for a shared understanding among decision-makers of housing needs and policy choices**

Virginia should recognize that development of effective state and local housing policy depends on ongoing and consistent information gathering and analysis that enables common understanding of needs and policy options.

Organizational responsibility for providing information and analysis services to housing policy-making bodies such as the Housing Commission should be more clearly defined and resources identified/provided to support the necessary capacity within those organizations (e.g., universities, planning district commissions, state agencies).